

Dear Commissioner for Human Rights of Council of Europe,

We would like to draw your urgent attention to current events in Slovenia, following the signature of the agreement between the Government of Republic of Slovenia and the Medical Trade Union of Slovenia FIDES concerning working conditions and certain aspects concerning the remuneration and on pay-per-performance model. The agreement encompasses also several measures to shorten the waiting lists which is currently the most important challenge in Slovenia's healthcare.

After the agreement was signed on 02/12/2016, the majority of other representative unions of public sector have started threatening to mobilize masses against our union in the case if the agreement is put in force. The movement is obviously supported also by two political parties of the ruling coalition who didn't support the agreement, and some media who apparently try to reach more attention by writing intolerant articles against doctors.

Formally, the unions claim they are just struggling for the social rights of their members. But it is obvious that all the matter is actually a populist movement against a concrete union and against professional group who - in their opinion - is guilty for their rather unsuccessful negotiations with the government. They have been trying to reach the complete abolishment of the austerity measures, introduced in 2012, but have not been very successful by now. So now they are openly blaming our union that our agreement with the Government "swallowed" all the disposable money for the public servants and for their claims. This is of course not true because the agreement with FIDES would require about 36 mio EUR, and this amount cannot be responsible for "swallowing" 255 mio EUR required by the unions who oppose our agreement.

We understand that the negotiations in the public sector are always difficult and we understand that there are always budgetary constraints which prevent everybody to fit his wishes. We also understand that Government didn't always stick to its promises. We understand that people envy each other and are angry if somebody else achieves something that somebody else didn't. We also encourage other unions not to give up and we even showed some possibilities where the others could follow our way.

But the leaders of several unions have apparently decided that the best way to improve their negotiation strategy is to spread the intolerance against the doctors and specifically against their trade union, and are even ready to organize protests which would very likely be understood as protests against physicians and against physicians' associations as a "class enemy" of the people. Before the agreement with FIDES was signed, there was no obvious intention to organize such protests, even if the possibilities to reach a favorable agreement for public servants were no better than they are now, after the agreement with our union is signed. So if it was all just about the rights of their members, they have no better cause for the mass action now than they had before. The only difference is that now they feel they can engage and mobilize protests more easily when they see people envious and pointing to a supposed "public enemy" called doctors and their union. The paramount proof that the intolerance against doctors has increased was a murder of a doctor in the hospital at a normal working day, just because the patient was not satisfied with the waiting list. We are really concerned that the present action is going to worsen the intolerance.

We of course recognize the right of each association to start union action for the rights of their members. But we strongly oppose that such an action be established on the grounds of intolerance against a specific professional group or against a specific trade union. So the Slovenian doctors and our union are increasingly feeling uneasy and victims of a public harrasment. We really doubt that the unions, even if the formal reason for their mass protest is the disappointment with their negotiation results, are capable to prevent the situation where the protest would turn into the protests of hatred against physicians and against their union and miss their formal motive.

Therefore, Commissioner, we would like to ask you to help and give us some advice on how to proceed in such a situation.

Hoping to hearing from you soon,

Yours faithfully,

Konrad Kuštrin, MD president of the Medical Trade Union FIDES